

Making a Difference



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newsletter

Jessica Rideout: the Difference Maker



JESSICA RIDEOUT IS A GRADE 8 STUDENT AT CRAWFORD BAY SCHOOL IN BC AND A RECIPIENT OF THE RICK HANSEN AWARD. Her contributions exemplify the qualities of determination, inspiration, courage, leadership, teamwork and making a difference in the lives of others that the Rick Hansen Awards Program aims to celebrate.

Jessica is visually impaired and studies braille and different technologies to help with her accelerating loss of sight. Wanting to be a teacher, Jessica worked for her school's community mentorship program where she taught a grade 5 science class and created a specialized book bag for a student with Cerebral Palsy.

"I wanted to create something that was very tactile," Jessica says. "I really enjoy connecting with other visually impaired students and helping out in any way I can."

Sofeya Devji, her vision teacher for the past three years, says of all of her students, Jessica is the most involved student in the West Kootenay region.


"Jessica has incredible leadership skills," Sofeya says. "She takes on activities that a coordinator would usually perform. She helps with the Kootenay Project Adventure for the Visually Impaired program, planning events, fundraising and helping with programming."

Jessica also acts as a role model for another visually impaired student in the community, writing a letter to the Honourable James Moore advocating for larger print materials at school, taking part in a video for the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired that was shown at a BC Ministry of Education Conference and demonstrating Goalball (a sport for the visually impaired) to the student body. Her extracurricular activities also include volunteering for the after school art club, hosting the Remembrance Day ceremony and helping out at the 2011 graduation ceremony

Dan Rude, the Principal of Crawford Bay School, notes that Jessica is up for anything. Dan says, **"She's not limited in her mindset at all... she's excelled at independent learning and is the first one to volunteer for any school activities."**

Principal Rude says the Rick Hansen School Program is a wonderful vehicle to recognize the great work and volunteering that takes place in school and the community. The program encourages a new generation to be difference makers, inspiring them through Rick Hansen's story to use positive social change to create a healthy and more inclusive world for all. "The grade 5-8 students are really proving to be early leaders," notes Dan. "Jessica is an outstanding example of that."

"The program is exceptionally easy to implement with lots of support in the form of posters, DVDs and certificates," Lori O'Neill, Jessica's teacher, says. "When we honoured our recipients at the year-end ceremony, there were eight very bright smiles on stage and many more proud smiles in the audience. Community members thought it was a very good thing to encourage students to volunteer."

"I was very surprised I won the Rick Hansen Award," Jessica says. "I was really proud, too." 

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Alberta for making this program possible in their Province.

A Special Message from Rick Hansen to Educators:

It's hard to believe 25 years have passed since I pushed my wheelchair around the globe with a dream of making the world more accessible and inclusive and to find a cure for spinal cord injury. In the years since, I have been grateful to receive support from Canadians and people all over the world, who have inspired me to continue pursuing those same dreams.

To commemorate the 25th Anniversary, the Rick Hansen Relay is retracing the Canadian segment of my original Tour, but this time one man in motion is being represented and celebrated by many in motion; engaging 7,000 participants from across Canada who have made their own difference in the lives of others, with a shared vision of celebrating everyday Canadians' contributions to their communities. Many celebrations and events are taking place in schools across the country thanks to the tremendous support of teachers, administrators, coaches and students.

I invite you to join us as we move from one Man In Motion to Many In Motion and encourage your students to do what they can to make a difference in the world. I believe that if enough of us choose to change even one small thing, together we have the power to change anything.

The 25th Anniversary is an unprecedented opportunity to engage the world and inspire a new generation of difference makers to dream, take action and join a movement for positive change towards a healthy, sustainable and inclusive world.

I wish everyone a successful and fulfilling year. Thank you again for the tremendous work you do in educating, supporting and inspiring your students to be the best they can be.

Sincerely,



Rick Hansen, C.C., O.B.C.



Mitchell Thiessen

MITCHELL THIESSEN IS A GRADE 7 STUDENT AT VEDDER MIDDLE SCHOOL IN CHILLIWACK, BC. Last year, he won the Rick Hansen Award at Evans Elementary School for his contributions as a Peer to other students. Mitchell joined the Peer Program when he was in grade 4 and was involved until the time he graduated.

"I really enjoyed helping the other kids," Mitchell says. "They looked up to me and knew to find me if they were having problems on the playground."

Mitchell's role as a Peer included assisting the Principal with special events, spending his recess and lunch breaks answering the school's phone, playing with and supporting younger students on the school playground who either struggled with friendships and/or had difficulties making positive choices with classmates, being a lunch monitor in the younger grade classrooms or playing with his "buddy" from a younger class. It also meant being a leader and setting an example for all the kids in the school of what a respectful and responsible student looks like.



While helping out as a Peer, Mitchell maintained his B Honours average and was awarded the Grade 6 Citizenship Award upon graduation.

Gabe D'Archangelo, Principal at Evans Elementary, says that from the moment he met Mitchell, he noted Mitchell's determination to do his best all the time.

"Mitchell always wanted to help make a difference, to help make the school a better place for our students. He truly put the school before self. Presenting Mitchell with the Rick Hansen Award gave us the opportunity to acknowledge the qualities we feel are important to teach all of our students; Mitchell was very deserving of the recognition." 

Sunnybrae Public School

Welcomes the Rick Hansen Relay with a Flash of Creativity

SUNNYBRAE PUBLIC SCHOOL IN INNISFIL, ONTARIO ROLLED OUT THE RED CARPET FOR THE RICK HANSEN 25TH ANNIVERSARY RELAY with a creatively choreographed student flash mob on December 8, 2011.

As the Relay arrived at the school, all of the students were outside waiting and the dance began, led by two student leaders. The crowd of 400 delivered a perfectly timed dance to “This Time for Africa” by the artist Shakira.

“Sunnybrae Public School was thrilled to perform our dance for the Rick Hansen 25th Anniversary Relay,” Len Dunkley, Sunnybrae’s Vice-Principal says. **“When Relay endurance athlete, Tyrone Henry, addressed our school, his words and passion really expanded our understanding of the true meaning of persistence and the modeling of positive character traits.”**

During October, the student leaders visited classes over a two-week period for fifteen minute sessions, teaching the dance to staff and students. In November, the entire school performed it for the first time in the schoolyard, as neighbours looked on awestruck.


“It was truly amazing to watch more than 400 people moving as one,” Len says. “This energy has now translated into future initiatives involving character education, assemblies and spirit events.”



Sunnybrae’s Global Action Committee created the dance and, similar to the Rick Hansen School Program, strives to empower students to act responsibly, make a difference and promote teamwork within the school and the community.

As a thank you, the Rick Hansen Relay team taught Sunnybrae students the official Medal-Bearer Firework dance that features accessible choreography and is a big hit on school stops around the country.

The 25th Anniversary of Rick’s Man In Motion World Tour is uniting Canadians from coast to coast to coast, inspiring a new generation to join Rick’s journey towards creating a healthier and more inclusive world. The Rick Hansen Relay kicked off in August in Cape Spear, Newfoundland and is making its way across Canada, having covered Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, PEI, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba so far. The Relay will arrive in Vancouver on May 22, 2012 having visited more than 600 communities, 460 schools and celebrated 7,000 Difference Makers from around the country.

Next up, the Relay will travel through Saskatchewan and Alberta before heading into BC for the final stretch home. Follow the Relay route at www.rickhansenrelay.com. 

New Teaching Resources!

Free 25th Anniversary on-line educational materials (lesson plans, videos, etc.) now available in English and French on our website—<http://www.rickhansen.com/SchoolResources>

Meet **Gordon Smith**

EDMONTON NATIVE GORDON SMITH HAS USED A WHEELCHAIR FOR 22 YEARS since battling a cancerous tumour on his spine. A retired university business professor, Gordon received three Instructor of Excellence awards during his career and the Faculty Emeritus Award upon retirement in 2005. In his role as a Rick Hansen Foundation Speaker, Gordon shares his engaging story with elementary school children, encouraging them to do their best and never give up in the face of adversity.

“I really enjoy the contact with the students,” Gordon says. “I do around five or six presentations a year and find the kids genuinely interested in my story and what life is like in a wheelchair. Inevitably, they will ask if I will ever walk again and even after all of these years, it is still an emotional subject for me. I try to be very honest with them because the reality is that I probably won’t **but that doesn’t stop me from living life to the fullest. This is a message I feel is very important for young people because we all face adversity in life.**”

Brenda Giourmetakis, Principal at Rideau Park School in Edmonton, has had Gordon speak at her school and says his presentation teaches the kids how being proactive can make an impact on others.

“It’s great to have an adult, especially one not one tied to the school, reinforce that message with the children,” Brenda says. “Parents and teaching staff really appreciated his message of perseverance and the many possibilities of making a difference in the lives of others.”

In his spare time, Gordon actively makes a difference in his own community, establishing the Sock It to Me program which provides clean socks to inner city agencies and shelters. Over the years, he has collected 50,000 pairs of socks, along with hats and mittens, for those in need. Helping young people understand that they have a role to play in making positive change in the world is something that energizes Gordon.

The Rick Hansen Foundation Speaker’s Program is available in communities across Canada. To enquire about availability or for bookings, please call **1.800.213.2131** or email schools@rickhansen.com. 



Difference Makers

*Do you know a Difference Maker?
Share their story with us and inspire
others to do the same.*

*Send us an email at
schools@rickhansen.com or call
Nathalie at 778.296.1513 or 1.800.213.2131*

To register or learn more about the free Rick Hansen School Program, visit us at RickHansen.com/schools or contact **Nathalie Earley** at **778.296.1513** (toll free **1.800.213.2131**) or schools@rickhansen.com.

Rick Hansen
Foundation 

Rick Hansen
SCHOOL PROGRAM

Dear Students,

As a young man, I was fortunate to benefit from the leadership and guidance of teachers and coaches, who taught me a very valuable lesson in life — it's not what happens to you that matters, but what you do with it that counts. After my spinal cord injury at the age of fifteen, I was devastated over losing the use of my legs. Thanks to the support from people around me, I found the motivation I needed to redefine my goals, and in doing so, realized that the only thing stopping me from achieving my dreams was my own attitude.

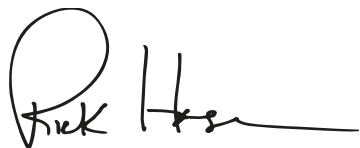
It was this understanding that gave me the confidence to get back into sports, to pursue my dreams, and to ultimately push my wheelchair around the world on my Man In Motion World Tour. I wanted to make a difference in the world, and I knew that if I believed in myself and had the courage to try, anything was possible.

Now, it's your turn. You are the leaders of tomorrow — the next generation of Difference Makers. Be a powerful champion of change and get involved. Contribute. Let my story inspire your own dream.

As the Rick Hansen 25th Anniversary Relay makes its way across Canada, I am continually amazed and inspired by the young men and women who are making a meaningful difference in the world. If enough of us choose to change even one small thing, together we have the power to change anything. I believe in you.

Anything is possible!

Sincerely,



Rick Hansen

